

Preparing for the successful JOB INTERVIEW

HEGI FAMILY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The Job Interview is a mutual exchange of information.

As the applicant, your main objectives are:

- ♦ *to communicate information about your skills and qualifications clearly and accurately.*
- ♦ *to connect this information to the requirements of the job for which you are interviewing.*
- ♦ *to seek additional information about the position and employer to determine if the position is an appropriate fit.*

The interviewer's main objectives are:

- ♦ *to assess how closely your qualifications match the requirements of the position and company.*
- ♦ *to present the organization in a positive manner, supplying accurate information to the prospective employee.*

*To view Interview Guide on-line go to:
<http://www.smu.edu/career/Interview.pdf>*

THE JOB INTERVIEW PROCESS

Think of the interview not as an interrogation, but as a two-way conversation during which you and the employer determine whether you meet each other's needs. There are a number of steps that you need to go through in order to maximize the success of this conversation.

STEP ONE – PREPARE

Prepare all necessary documents needed for the interview - Resume, Cover Letter, etc. You will always want to take along extra copies of your resume, transcript, and references. Consider purchasing a leather portfolio to hold your documents and a pen and paper to record notes, if need be. For assistance in critiquing your resume or cover letter, come by SMU Career Services and meet with a career counselor during Counselor-on-Duty hours, or set up an appointment.

Plan your attire - First impressions are powerful, so you will want to look professional. Some suggestions on professional dress for an interview are:

Suits/Dresses:	Conservative, in dark colors (dark blue, black, gray, or tan)
Shirts/Blouses:	Simple, in soft colors
Socks:	Calf-length, complimenting the suit
Stockings:	Beige, tan, or natural
Shoes:	Men - polished, should match suit; Women - polished, medium heels
Ties:	Silk, coordinated with the suit
Handbag:	Medium or small size, in a color matching the outfit
Hair:	Conservative hairstyle that does not distract from professionalism
Jewelry:	Men - no jewelry; Women - Simple jewelry

Anticipate interview format - Ask questions beforehand, such as: "With whom will I be meeting?" "How long should I plan to be at your office?" Knowing the format will help you prepare for the interview experience.

STEP TWO - RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION AND THE POSITION

Learn as much about the company and position you are applying for before you go to the interview. Visit the company's web site or read company literature. Analyze the job description and try to match your experiences, interests, and abilities to their requirements for the position. Visit the SMU Career Services' web site at www.smu.edu/career and investigate links related to your particular occupational field.

STEP THREE - KNOW YOURSELF

Prepare to discuss your strengths, weaknesses, educational and work experiences, personal goals, and values. Read the job description thoroughly, anticipating questions which focus on your qualifications, their organization, and how the two fit together. Among questions you may be asked are:

Tell me about yourself.
What are your goals?
Why do you want to work for this company?
Why should we hire you?

STEP FOUR - MAKE A LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ASK THEM

The questions you ask (or do not ask) will reveal much about your level of interest in the company, and your level of preparation for the interview. Ask questions which demonstrate a genuine interest in and knowledge of the company and position. Although each situation will warrant specific inquiries, some suggested questions are:

What characteristics do you look for in a person to have success at your company?

What are a few of the problems I will be expected to solve?

What is the traditional career path for this position, and in what ways do you evaluate an employee?

If I may ask, what is your timetable for filling this current position?

STEP FIVE - FOLLOW UP

Write a brief letter of thanks for the interview. In the letter you need to reiterate your interest in the position and briefly state why you are the best candidate. If you do not hear from anyone in a week, then call to express your continued interest in the position.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A BETTER INTERVIEW

BE SURE TO...

- Arrive early
- Be neatly groomed
- Display good hygiene
- Dress accordingly
- Make good eye contact
- Give a firm handshake
- Demonstrate good posture
- Speak with confidence
- Maintain interviewer's pace, style of speech
- Be polite
- Answer questions directly
- End interview with gratitude and enthusiasm for the job

...AND DO NOT:

- ◆ Arrive late without warning
- ◆ Look shabby or disheveled
- ◆ Show poor hygiene
- ◆ Wear obnoxious attire
- ◆ Under- or over-dress
- ◆ Avoid eye contact
- ◆ Have a weak or overpowering handshake
- ◆ Slouch or show bad posture
- ◆ Speak too loudly or too softly
- ◆ Appear hyperactive or passive
- ◆ Make answers too lengthy or brief
- ◆ End interview without gratitude

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral Questions

The most common type of interviewing style of questioning is the behavioral interview. The questions aim at determining how you would operate on the job. How you responded to certain past situations is of great interest to the interviewer in assessing your potential as an employee. Examples of behavioral questions include:

Give me an example of a time when you had to juggle multiple tasks.

Tell me of a situation in which you solved a problem as a member of a group. What was your role?

Tell me about a problem you once had on the job. How did you go about resolving the problem?

Behavioral Answers

Strong answers to behavioral questions describe specific situations where your actions are the focus. Often, behavioral questions cover specific "themes" required by the position such as: time management, teamwork, initiative, organizational and communication skills, and so on. One strategy for answering behavior-based questions is to use the **STAR** formula (Situation, Task, Action, Response). The formula ensures that you deliver a complete and concise answer. For example:

Question: Describe a time when you were a team member and someone fell behind. **Theme:** Teamwork

Answer: **Situation** - I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members was not showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments.

Task - To maintain a good relationship with him, and to help him do the job, I met with him in private.

Action - I explained to him the team's frustration and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was failing another class, so I found someone to help him with that coursework.

Result - He not only was able to spend more time on our project, he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and receive high scores.

Traditional Questions

Traditional questions include questions to clarify points on your resume, evaluate your accomplishments and goals, and assess your expectations of the company. Themes work into these questions also, as well as opportunities for you to showcase your strengths. Some traditional questions and themes are:

1. **Question:** What are your strengths and weaknesses?
Theme: How well you know yourself, as well as how honest and open you are
2. **Question:** Where do you see yourself in five years?
Theme: Ambition
3. **Question:** Why should I hire you?
Theme: Understanding of company's needs, as well as confidence of your qualifications

Traditional Answers

1. **Question:** Describe your most important accomplishment to date.
Theme: Success, potential, and ambition

Sample Answer: During my senior year, I had the opportunity to compete in a regional marketing competition. I worked as part of a four-person team to develop a comprehensive marketing plan. Not only did we take first place at the regional competition, but we placed first at the national competition as well. It was extremely rewarding to put the knowledge I gained in the classroom to work.
2. **Question:** Why do you want to work here?
Theme: Measure of knowledge of company and interest in it

Sample Answer: I have researched the leading companies in this industry, and yours seems to be the one that does the best job in terms of customer relations, encouraging risk-taking, and setting challenging goals. These qualities appeal to me.
3. **Question:** Are you more comfortable working in a team environment or on your own?
Theme: Relationships with others and self (employers need people who can work well both ways)

Sample Answer: Some projects are more suitable for teams, others for individuals. I work well both ways, depending on the project.

Difficult Questions

Difficult questions are those questions that you are hoping they do not ask. For instance, if your resume does not show continuous employment, you should expect to be asked for an explanation. In order to answer these questions, you will need to come to terms with the issue at hand, see the positive side of it, and demonstrate that you are eager to move on with your career. Examples of how to handle this style of questions are:

1. **Question:** Why did you leave your last job?
Situation: You were laid off

Sample Answer: I was one of 200 people laid off last September when XYZ Corporation went through a major downsizing.
2. **Question:** Why did you leave your last job?
Situation: You were fired

Sample Answer: To be honest with you, I just did not fit into the organization. Finally, my supervisor and I decided it was best for me to leave. While this was a difficult experience, I feel your organization would provide a better fit and I am ready to begin again to do the caliber of work of which I am capable.

For more information regarding interview questions, please view the *Successful Interviewing Guide*, available online or at <http://www.smu.edu/career/Interview.pdf>

. Also, see the list of sample questions provided on the last page of this handout.

LAST MINUTE TIPS

- Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early
- Express a positive and enthusiastic attitude
- Pay attention to your body language
- Show confidence without being arrogant
- Speak positively about past and current employment experiences
- End the interview with a closing statement
- Open up to the interviewer so that he or she gets a glimpse of who you are
- Be yourself!

QUESTIONS TO PRACTICE FOR THE INTERVIEW

If you would like, you can meet with a career counselor at SMU Career Services and engage in a mock interview. The list below is just a sampling of the questions you might like to rehearse, in addition to any specific questions you might care to include. You will receive helpful feedback to assist you through the process.

1. Describe yourself.
2. List three things former coworkers would say about you.
3. What would you say is the most important thing you learned from your college career?
4. Describe your most creative class and give an example of your personal contribution to its creativity.
5. Tell me about a course in which you felt your performance was not up to par. What happened?
6. What extracurricular activities were you involved in? What skills did you learn from them?
7. How will you use those skills on the job?
8. Give a detailed example of how you completed multiple tasks during a typical week.
9. Give an example of a conflict or any other high-pressure situation you encountered and how you handled it.
10. Describe a problem you encountered during your college days. How did you solve it? Be specific.
11. How has your college experience prepared you for the career you have chosen?
12. How do you handle stress?
13. What has been your experience in working as part of a team?
14. Do you often assume the role of leader. Describe a situation when you applied those steps.
15. Describe three past goals you once set for yourself. How did you reach them?
16. What things do you look for in an organization?
17. What qualities do you look for in a supervisor?
18. In your last review what did your supervisor suggest needed improvement?
19. Your supervisor asks you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable. You perceive his or her request as improper. What would you do?
20. How would you describe the ideal job for you?
21. What do you know about this company?
22. Are you willing to travel?

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